

So, you want to be an appraiser? Great! (Now what do you do?) Stepping into the appraisal industry, as I am sure most trainees will attest to, is not the easiest task. But, one could argue, neither is becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a police officer etc. Nearly every profession has educational requirements; some have physical requirements, and most have “training” requirements.

To become a state certified residential or certified general real estate appraiser in the State of Iowa you need 2500 (certified residential) or 3000 (certified general) hours “experience” respectively, to round out the requirements for licensure. The experience is in essence the hands-on training that is provided by a mentor.

Within our industry, we have typically assigned the word “supervisor” in lieu of the word mentor. I would simply caution that if you are a trainee, while technically, you need a “supervising appraiser”; you need to carefully consider what the difference between these two roles can be and actively seek a mentor, regardless of the term used in the signing of the report.

A supervisor, by definition is a person who manages, or directs. A mentor however is defined more aptly as an advisor. An advisor, by title, implies *that the giver of the advice has knowledge or experience*. It is the knowledge and the experience that is the invaluable aspect of the training/experience gathering process towards licensure. If a trainee is simply being “supervised”, then there could be cause for concern when actual demonstration of competency for credit of the experience is requested.

Signs that you are being “supervised” versus “mentored”:

1. A supervisor will inspect only a handful of properties with you before “setting you loose”.

A mentor will inspect a variety of property types, conditions, locales, value ranges, etc., *for as long as it takes* for you to be considered competent in the data gathering process that is the start of nearly every appraisal assignment. A mentor will continue to inspect properties with you throughout your 2500-hour (and 24 month) experience requirement, as necessary, based upon the complexity of the assignment. A mentor will show you how to appropriately and accurately measure and sketch the improvements, which are the subject of the assignment.

2. A supervisor will give you technical pointers and verbiage for the structure (double-hung windows; poured concrete foundation; vinyl siding, etc).

A mentor will show you the differences in types of construction and materials used in different styles, age, and quality types of homes. The mentor will encourage you to become familiar with construction terms by reading, taking a class or walking with you through the local hardware store looking at various components of a property (windows, doors, paint, siding, roofing materials, flooring materials, etc), until you can understand the differences in quality, characteristics of construction (vaulted ceilings, superior mill work, multi-gabled roof lines, etc) *and how this impacts value*. A mentor will help you understand and evaluate the condition of a property based upon the quality of the materials used in construction, and the maintenance it has or may not have received.

3. A supervisor will instruct you to “fill out the form”.

A mentor will explain the importance of a proper neighborhood description; will help you understand the necessity of adequately and accurately describing the market area; will help you understand how to confirm zoning and analyze the affects of a particular zoning classification on highest and best use; will help you understand and accurately estimate the effective age of a property; and will help you recognize, accurately identify, and understand the affects of functional, physical and external obsolescence.

4. A supervisor will show you how to develop the cost approach.

A mentor will teach you how to support, document and defend the Cost Approach, as well as how to extract, support and apply any necessary functional or external obsolescence that may exist. A mentor will help you understand how physical depreciation is applied. A mentor will show you how to support land value, and instruct you in the understanding and application of cost manuals.

5. A supervisor will tell you to find three comparable properties and “grid” them.

A mentor will teach you the process of selecting appropriate elements of comparison, understanding the neighborhood and market area prior to the selection of comparables, and will show you how and where to make searches for the information so that all properties that can/should be considered, are. A mentor will help you understand why some properties are “better” than others in a comparison, and will show you how to verify each property with proper due diligence required.

6. A supervisor will tell you what adjustments should be made.

A mentor will teach you how to support and defend adjustments. A mentor will show you how the adjustments are derived from the market and how this process is a continual process of research within the office for each element considered.

A mentor will help you understand the application of the adjustment, or perhaps the lack of an adjustment.

7. A supervisor will have you select a number from the indicated range, for a final value.

A mentor will help you analyze the data after adjustments have been made, and appropriately weight and consider all the information available, including perhaps, sales, listings or offers which were not “gridded” in the report.

8. A supervisor will have you add boilerplate addenda for legal purposes.

A mentor will help you write pertinent, necessary and understandable narrative to provide the reader and users of the report with a clear understanding of the processes, analysis and data gathering that took place. A mentor will help you develop a final reconciliation that is supported, documented and defensible.

These are just a few of the differences, between a “supervisor” and a “mentor”. Regardless of the term that you apply to the person providing this service to you...it is imperative that you understand which type of person it is that you are learning from. It is quite possible for a supervisor to also be a mentor, but if you are only going to have one of these attributes, make sure that it is the mentor you are working for.

Additionally, a “true” mentor would also encourage you to send out some of your work to a peer for review and constructive criticism. Even the best appraiser can always find ways to improve how they say something, or find that another’s opinion might provide better or other methods of reasonable analysis, which could be considered.

It’s best not to wait until you are nearly done with your required experience hours to find out if you have been properly “trained” – ask the board for advice in locating a qualified peer reviewer – this may cost you something, but last time I checked, education was not free. Good luck!